



Colgate's grave, marked by a simple cross, is only a few feet from the edge of Highway 12. The mugs in the background are the remains of huge cedars which once grew in the area.

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Photos Courtesy Author

# DID George Colgate

The question is still being argued. It all boils down to: How far do you have to go in being your brother's keeper?

ABOUT forty miles west of Lolo Pass, along Highway 12 in Central Idaho, a rest stop has been built by the Forest Service. Besides being a place where weary travelers can stay a while, they will also be able to learn a little from a sign about a tragedy which took place there seventy-five years ago when it was a lonely wilderness, long before any road—and only one trail—passed the place. The sign tells briefly about the abandonment of one member of a hunting party when he became too sick to travel.

It was in the fall of 1893 that William E. Carlin, son of General Carlin, Commander of U. S. Troops at Vancouver, Washington; John Harvey Pierce, young Carlin's brother-in-law; A. A. Hemmelmeyer from New York; and Martin Spencer decided to go on a hunting trip deep into a remote section of Idaho along the Lochsa River, near the Montana line. Deer, elk and grizzly bear were plentiful there at that time.

The party agreed to meet at Kendrick, a town about 20 miles east of Lewiston, Idaho and 100 miles west of the proposed hunting ground. At Kendrick they purchased several horses, including pack and saddle animals, guns and much ammunition along with what they deemed enough food. All this was under the direction of Spencer, and there also they hired George Colgate as their cook.

The party left Kendrick on a clear crisp, fall morning, promising they would be back in a few weeks with plenty of wild game for everyone. Everything seemed to be in order, and no one worried about the group's safety for such hunting trips were common. In fact, it was only after the fifth week had passed that friends in Kendrick became alarmed. A Lieutenant Overman and four cavalrymen had

ridden into town from Fort Walla Walla and reported the party might have become snowbound and an order for a search had been sent out. Tom Beall, an old, experienced guide, of Lewiston, Idaho, was engaged and the soldiers departed toward the Bitterroot Mountains. At the same time a Colonel Burt of Fort Missoula had been ordered to send a rescue party from Montana. The leader of this group was Lieutenant Martin of Fort Spokane, who knew the mountains well and happened to be at Fort Missoula at the time. In company with a Lieutenant Dovel and a mountain man by the name of Wright, who was to act as guide, he set out from the east heading for Lolo Pass but had to turn back because of deep snow.

Even though two rescue parties were already on the way, General Carlin dispatched still a third troupe, including Lieutenant Charles Elliot, Sergeant Norton and a man named Smart, along with a Corporal Nolan, with instructions to pick up a guide and travel as swiftly as possible on the trail of the rescue party which had left Kendrick a couple of days before.

rest reached Kendrick they gave the following account of their disastrous adventure. It was on October 5 that the hunters decided to conclude the trip because of a heavy snowfall. It was already belly deep to the horses on the trail they had followed into the high mountains. They had waited too long. After trying to ride out they were forced to turn back to their camp on the river. That night their horses disappeared and were never seen again.

By morning the snow was falling more heavily and the men, although without snowshoes, decided to fight their way down the Lochsa River. Carrying all their provisions they struck out downstream, floundering through drifts and falling over rocks hidden by the snow. Only a mile or so was made the first day. Going into camp once more they spent several days and consumed most of their supplies. Finally the storm abated somewhat. With the snow settling down into a fairly solid crust they decided to move again downriver, but complications had arisen because Colgate had become ill and was unable to travel.

## HAVE TO DIE?

His companions, verging on panic, decided to leave him and after constructing a raft reached the spot about thirty miles downstream where the rescue party found them.

It was assumed that Colgate had died quickly in camp and the happening was written off as just another wilderness tragedy and was almost forgotten by most people.

Still there were a few who wondered about the incident, and the following year, in February, a party consisting of Charley Colgate, son of the dead cook, Charley Martin and several others set out to solve the riddle.

CARRYING provisions for two weeks they fought their way into the mountains through heavy drifts of snow, toward the spot where Colgate had supposedly died.

The trip required almost twice as long as had been anticipated but even with their clothes in tatters and with scarcely any food they continued the search for the man's body. Going into camp one night the bedraggled men set fire to a dead snag for warmth. It burned through after a while and toppled over on Martin,



Above, the wild Lochsa River, filled with huge boulders which dashed the raft of the ill-fated party to pieces. Photo below is believed to be the actual cabin where the rescue party met the two trappers. It can be seen from the road and is still used occasionally by an old prospector.

injuring him severely.

His clothing was burned and he had a broken collar bone, plus a multitude of severe lacerations on his hands and face. This time, however, the rest of the party determined to take care of the injured man.

After nursing him for almost a week, they decided they must reach help. Fashioning a crude litter from poles and willow boughs they carried Martin nearly thirty miles to reach the cabin of a trapper who had plenty of food.

For several days they rested up, then started for Kendrick. On the way they were met by a group who had set out to search for them. Martin soon regained his health, but the trip had been in vain.

The summer of 1894, Lieutenant Elliot, who had led the first rescue party, was given a routine assignment by the army to lead a surveying party into the very mountains where Colgate had been abandoned.

More by accident than design his party found the remains of a human skeleton. Clinging to one of the bones was enough clothing to identify the remains of George Colgate. Nearly they also found several articles which he had had in his pockets. Identification was beyond question.

As the remains were found five or six miles farther down the river from where his companions claimed he had been left, two schools of thought developed. One was that if Colgate had been able to travel that far alone, with assistance he could have been saved. The other line of thinking was that the Carlin party did right in leaving him in order to insure its own safety.

Going on upriver the surveying party reached the original spot where the hunting party had camped and there buried the remains of Colgate on the banks of the Lochsa River. His grave can be seen today by those who pause for a moment to enjoy the peace and quiet of the forest.